



# Cohabitation as an Ingredient of Italian Housing First Italian Projects

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My lenses: cohabitation



# Why cohabitation

The focus of my research is connected to a specific ingredient of social and care policies with a housing dimension, namely, organized cohabitation among unrelated users.

The topic is little explored, both by the social sciences, by those involved in the analysis of public policies, and by those disciplines that look more closely at the dimensions of space.

Hyper-proximity in domestic spaces is an issue that concerns many social groups and social needs.

In fact, there are several social services and projects that target coexistence “under the same roof and behind the same door” (Costa, 2015a; 2020) as a fundamental pillar of their action.

Sharing domestic spaces in welfare interventions allows to reduce costs, to better organize professional work and to implement individualized programs that possibly make day by day sharing - of experiences, of ways of doing and being, of facing problems - a strength.

cohabitation  
(in «civilian  
apartments»,  
not in  
residential  
settings

- Just a way to saving money, cutting costs?
- Just the result of other services shortage?
- Just the way to reduce the complexity of other places based services?
- Just the result of shortages/ limits of housing solutions?

Or

A specific ingredient of policies/programs/  
projects aims?

**A CONTENT OR A CONTAINER?**

- Chosen cohabitation X cohabitation as a "last chance": to what extent can people choose to go live with others, with strangers, rather than receive other kinds of supports to cope and have a place to live? Are there alternatives? Also, can they express preferences about where and with whom they live?

- Temporary cohabitation X cohabitation without time constraints: is the cohabitation project "time-based"? Does it impose time limits or not? Are there exceptions to the time limits given by the project and under what conditions? Are other housing solutions and supports given when people are not eligible anymore to the project?

-Narrow" cohabitation - "wide" cohabitation: how "narrow" or vice versa comfortable is the sharing of spaces within the common home? Does one have "a room of one's own" (to quote Virginia Woolf)? Or does one have to sleep with others? Are there spaces for privacy? Can spaces be personalized?

- Homogeneous cohabitation-heterogeneous cohabitation: are the cohabitants all people who have the same problems, or do they cohabit with people who have others, or even none (except, for example, that of access to low-cost housing, as happens in cohabitation between age peers, care leavers and students in their first years of university)?



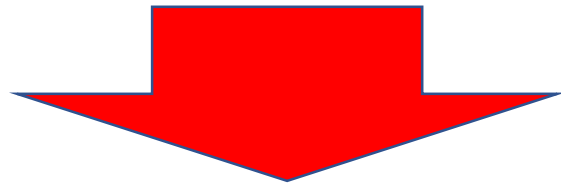
# Cohabitation is one of the elements of HF adaptation

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- “How can the policy be implemented maintaining fidelity to its ethos but also taking into consideration local necessities and specificities?» (Lancioni et al. 2017)  
THERE IS A HUGE LITERATURE ABOUT FIDELITY
- HF is a codified model but its implementation gave birth to very different forms around the world
- Fidelity scale (Stefancic et al., 2013)
- «It is important to emphasize that the HF approach, which is strong through its legitimation, is travelling, but its travels bring it constantly up against practices, thinking, customs, desires, resources and systems that tend to modify it. In short, this happens because policies are not instruction manuals for operating in the world, but social artefacts that spring from constantly changing territories and contexts (Governa, 2014), in Lancione et al. 2017
- «The deviations from the pioneer “model” in terms of organising housing and support confirm a need for “programme drift” and adjustment when transferring an approach to different local conditions» (Peace, 2013).

# Italian HF

- HF has been adapted and it is continuously changing
- “a number of organizations – due to a lack of resources and/or the chance to work with the private property market – do not provide a single home, but use apartments where several people live together (at times even without a separate room of their own)». (Lancione et al. 2017)



Cohabitation regards 41% of HF projects (2017/2019)



# That is reflected in peoples' views

- “I do not believe I am pursuing a pure HF project”
- “I’m always asking my self if I’m pursuing a real HF project”
- “we felt the need to have a Fiops consultation about the validity of our service”
- “we try to add value to our work even if we are doing cohabitation and even if these cohabitations are small and everybody has a room”

# My (ongoing) fieldwork

- Interviews to project managers, services coordinators of 8 HF projects in 6 different Italian Regions using cohabitation
- Interviews to key informants (scholars, activists, policy makers)
- 2021-2022

# Background characteristics

- Plurality of targets in the HF projects
- Apartments with different sizes, frequently sizes not chosen for the projects
- Tenure (very rarely there is the possibility to be real tenants without the intermediation of organizations)
- Users are coming not from the road but from the shelters normally
- Referrals come from territorial social services

“cohabitation can be both a limitation and a resource” (Solco)

# Pragmatism

cohabitation is used for pragmatic reasons for both organisations and users:

- 1) For organisations: there are few apartments disposable and affordable enough for the implementation of HF so gathering users under the same roof is a sustainable strategy
- 2) For users: to share costs, to fight loneliness, to cope with duties related to the project

# Sense

- “The advantages of cohabitation in many cases concern people who have problems, physical problems or who may also experience loneliness. Many times the fact of cohabitation can be a positive element, it can be a stimulating element, it can be an element of mutual surveillance with respect to one's own frailties and it can also be in some cases, for example with younger people, a source of friendship or sociability” (Solco)
- An example: “So a very positive example of cohabitation was certainly born in one of the most conflictual flats where a person who had problems, that is, he was deaf and dumb from birth, a foreigner who didn't speak Italian, he didn't even speak Urdu, his mother tongue, because he was from Pakistan and therefore arrived in Italy in a condition of significant handicap. Inside the flat, he found a fellow student, a roommate who helped him a lot after he got a cochlear device, so he started to actually hear and learn Italian, to do the exercises and then to become part of the connective tissue of society through communication.

## + Cohabitation

- Increases the number of people inserted in HF projects
- Fight isolation and loneliness
- Sociability
- Mutual help relationships
- Learning together how to manage an apartment (duties, expenses)
- Highest capacity to share costs
- Highest capacity to take-up renting contracts out of the HF project

## - - Cohabitation

- High and frequent conflicts
- perpetuation of deviant behaviours
- too extense use of professionals

“I have never seen cohabitation add a value to people's planning but it has often added a problem. People find it very hard to live together for practical logistical reasons”



# Coping with conflicts

- Social/target mix

“We work on the concept of a welfare mix, so we don't make flats where everyone who has been sent to us by the Sert, who has been sent to us by the CSM or who has been sent to us by the social service goes, but we try to mix according to the type of history that the person brings at the time of application, in an attempt precisely to avoid ghettoisation as much as possible, even within the flats themselves” (Solco).

- The use of covenants for a “good cohabitation”
- A higher use of professional work, also into the houses
- Moving people between apartments (when it's possible)

# Conditions for +++

- Agency and choice
- Private spaces
- Rules, possibly also co-produced
- Support to the wider environment, condominiums
- Long time staying
- Support in exiting